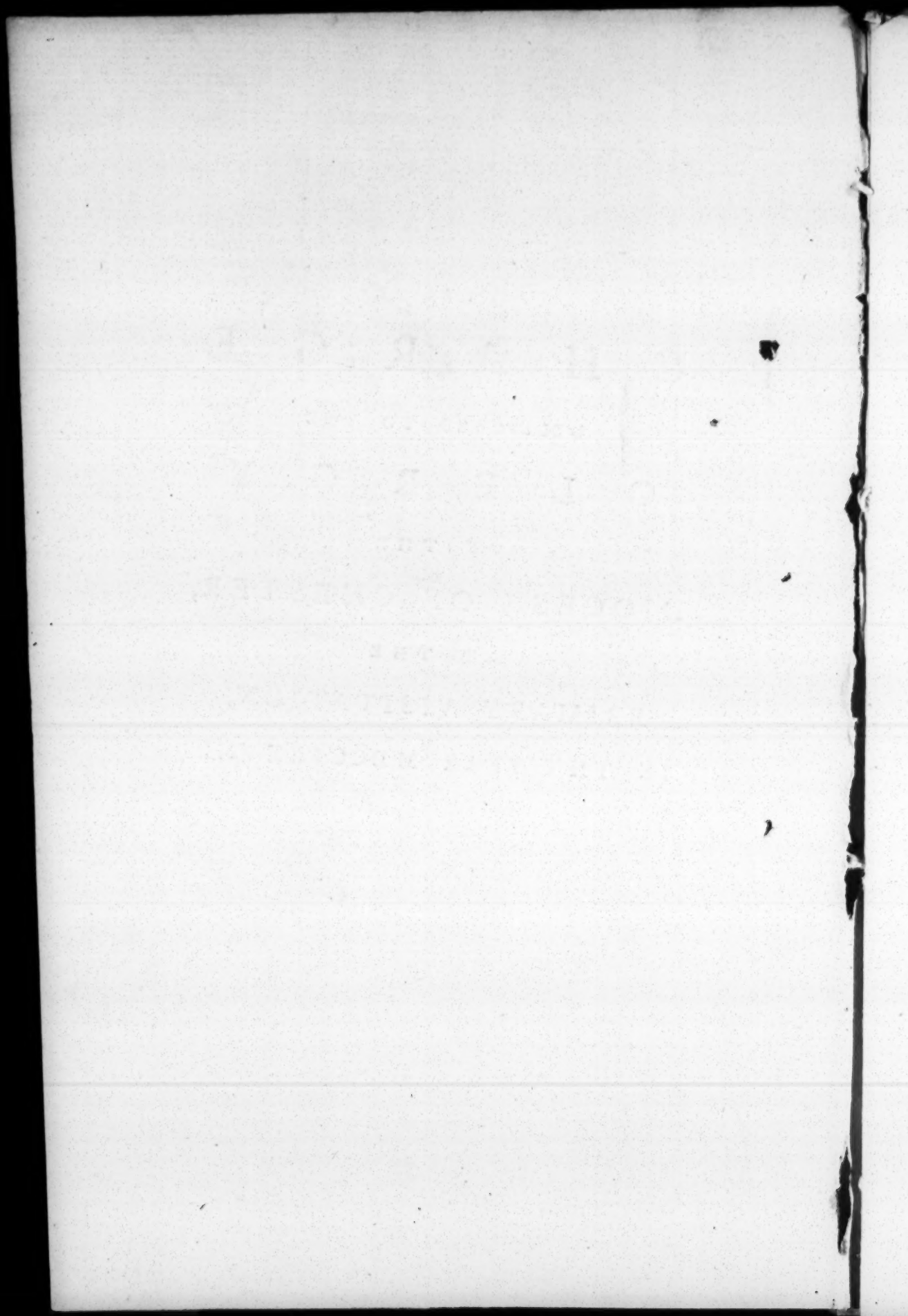


V. V. Leigh

A
C H A R G E
DELIVERED TO THE
C L E R G Y
OF THE
DIOCESE OF CHESTER,
AT THE
PRIMARY VISITATION,
IN THE YEAR MDCCLXXVIII.



A
C H A R G E

DELIVERED TO THE
C L E R G Y
OF THE
DIOCESE OF CHESTER,

AT THE
PRIMARY VISITATION

OF THAT
D I O C E S E

IN THE YEAR MDCCCLXXVIII,
BY BEILBY LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER.

D. Ponteous.

C H E S T E R :
P R I N T E D B Y J . P O O L E ,
I N F O R E G A T E - S T R E E T .

M D C C L X X I X .

1578/601.



TO THE REVEREND THE CLERGY,

OF THE DIOCESE OF CHESTER,

THIS CHARGE,

PRINTED AT THEIR REQUEST,

IS WITH GREAT REGARD,

AND FERVENT PRAYERS FOR THEIR WELFARE,

INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR AFFECTIONATE BROTHER,

AND SERVANT IN CHRIST.

B. CHESTER.

Chester, October, 1779.

THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

OF ENGLAND

FROM THE REFORMATION

TO THE PRESENT TIME

Reverend Brethren,

HAVING been raised by Providence and his Majesty's goodness to the superintendence of this extensive and populous diocese, I thought it my duty, as it certainly was my inclination, to make myself acquainted with you as soon as possible; and to desire your friendly assistance and concurrence in the execution of that weighty and important trust, which, after having passed through much abler hands, is now devolved upon me. For this purpose I have here called you together; and as you will probably wish to know, in the first place, what my own sentiments are relative to our common concerns, I shall without further preface lay them before you; entreating you at the same time to interpret what I say with candour, and to give me, at proper opportunities, any information, and suggest to me any useful ideas that may occur to your thoughts.

My intention at present is to give you a very brief and general view of the principal duties and qualifications which the pastoral office requires; intending hereafter (if it should please God to grant me life and health) to enter into a more minute and accurate consideration of each particular point.

In order to trace this subject to its first source, I shall begin with the education of a Clergyman. For with concern it must be owned, that this is not in general so properly adapted to his future profession as might be wished. This remark is not founded solely on the observations I have made in my own diocese, but on that much longer experience I had during my continuance in the service of a great and good prelate now no more *. I had then but too many opportunities of knowing, that
they

* Archbishop Secker.—*Summus vir summo in loco*, as he was well described by the excellent Bishop Lowth; who has also done ample justice to his literary character, in the preliminary Dissertation to his accurate and sublime translation of the prophet Isaiah.

they who offered themselves for orders were not always so well prepared as they might have been for taking upon them that sacred character. Even they who had enjoyed the benefit of an University education, were sometimes not less deficient in this respect than those that came immediately from country schools. It has not unfrequently happened, that young men of the best talents, who had passed with the highest reputation through every stage of their academical studies, have entered into the church with so little knowledge of their profession as to be but very moderately qualified for discharging the common duties of the smallest country cure. This, it must be owned, was a most unhappy instance of neglect; but it has, I believe, been in some measure repaired, and will, I hope, in time be wholly remedied. In many private colleges very excellent lectures have for some years past been given by tutors of great learning and ingenuity, on the evidences and doctrines of the Christian Faith. At Oxford the late worthy Professor in Divinity † took great and laudable

† The Rev. Dr. Bentham.

laudable pains in this department; and his learned successor ‡ intends (as I am informed) to follow his example. At Cambridge, a new institution will probably soon take place, founded on a very pious benefaction lately bequeathed to that university, for the purpose of furnishing the students there with a compleat course of instruction in revealed religion§. Much good fruit may, I think, be expected from so wise an establishment. In the meanwhile I hope that every one of you who have children, relations or friends, destined for the ministerial office, will endeavour to impress upon them the necessity of an early and serious attention to the studies peculiarly belonging to it. Such of you more especially as have the care of schools, in which young men are educated for the church without going to either of our universities,

‡ The Rev. Dr. Wheeler.

§ Mr. Norris, a gentleman of large fortune in Norfolk, who died a few years since, left by will to the university of Cambridge 100l. per ann. for the salary of a Professor, who is to read fifty lectures every year on the Christian Revelation to the students of that university.

universities, should for the last two or three years of their continuance with you, put such books into their hands as may prepare them properly for the important business they have in view. The greater part of those who apply for ordination in this diocese are of that description; and therefore it is certainly incumbent on their masters to take care that they do not come unqualified. What the *lowest degree* of qualification is which I can accept, I have already signified in some printed directions to candidates for orders, which will this day be put into your hands. But it would be a poor ambition in them indeed to aim at nothing more than being *barely admissible*. They should endeavour to excel and do credit to their masters and themselves. To such as these I shall at all times be ready to give more particular directions.

But suppose them admitted to orders; they must not imagine that their trouble is then at an end, and that they have no need of any further application to their studies. On the contrary, they must
now

now pursue them with unremitting diligence, especially if they have been wanting in this before. They must, in the first place, endeavour to obtain a thorough and complete knowledge of the holy scriptures. They must think it incumbent upon them, as it certainly is, to read them in their original languages, especially the New Testament. They must call in the aid of the best and most approved commentators: to this they must add some acquaintance with ecclesiastical history in general, and with that of our own country in particular. They will also find it requisite to gain some insight into the various controversies that have been carried on in the Christian world: the objections of Deists to revealed religion, of Atheists to all religion; the chief points in dispute between our own church and that of Rome, and the peculiar tenets, doctrines, and forms of worship which discriminate the several denominations of Protestants, both in this country and in others, one from another. These severer studies it may be necessary sometimes to diversify and relieve by the
lighter

lighter occupations of polite literature: but we should beware of giving up too much of our time to these delightful pursuits, which ought certainly to be the amusement only, not the employment, of our lives.

Indeed, no studies of any kind ought ever to interfere with that which is our proper business, the regular and punctual discharge of all our sacred functions. It is these which ought to occupy much the greatest part of our time and thoughts, and nothing more than our leisure hours should be given up to books. You are called in scripture AMBASSADORS, WATCHMEN, STEWARDS, LABOURERS, and the ordination office enjoins, “ that you never
 “ cease your labour, your care and diligence, until you have done all that lieth in you, according to your bounden
 “ duty, to bring all such as are or shall be committed to your charge unto that
 “ agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be
 “ no

“ no place left among you either for error
 “ in religion, or for viciousness in life.”

For this purpose you will not content yourselves merely with performing the stated public offices of the church ; but will descend into the far more necessary private duties of the pastoral care. You will make yourselves acquainted with your parishioners, you will make yourselves their friends as well as their ministers, and will eagerly seize all those favourable opportunities which such familiar communications will afford to win their affections and improve their hearts ; to instruct the ignorant, to strengthen the weak, to confirm the doubtful, to reclaim the sinner, to encourage the penitent, to convince the unbeliever. And more especially when their minds are softened and subdued by sickness or misfortune, you will consider this as a season peculiarly proper for making deep and lasting impressions upon their minds. You will, in short, not only read the Scriptures and preach the Word, but as you are enjoined before God and the
 Lord

Lord Jesus Christ, you will be “ instant
 “ in season and out of season, reprove,
 “ rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering
 “ and doctrine, endure affliction, do the
 “ work of an evangelist, and make full
 “ proof of your ministry. †”

You will easily see that all these ministerial labours (which are in fact nothing more than your bounden duty) presuppose your personal residence upon your cures. The laws of the land do in general require it, and the proper discharge of your sacred functions renders it necessary. They who possess more preferments than one, ought to divide their time and their labours in due proportions between them, and by redoubled diligence in both, make amends for their necessary absence from each. They who have but one benefice are subject not only to ecclesiastical censures, but to pecuniary penalties for absenting themselves from it. But you, my brethren, will, I trust, disdain to be influenced solely by such ignoble considerations

† ii. Tim. iv. 2. 5.

ations as these. You will act from higher and worthier motives. You will be led both by inclination and a sense of duty to live in the midst of your parishioners, to make that place your principal home, where the scene of your principal business lies ; and will not be prevailed on by any temptations of ease, pleasure, or mere convenience, to abandon those of whose salvation you have voluntarily taken the charge, and bound it by the most sacred ties upon your own souls. It may indeed happen, that for want of a proper dwelling house, or other very urgent reasons (of which your ordinary ought to be the judge) you may be obliged to live at some small distance from your cure. But even then, you will not, I hope, content yourselves with merely going there on Sundays to perform the service required on that day. This, as I have just shewn you, is but a small part of what a truly conscientious clergyman will think himself bound to do, for the benefit of those committed to his care. Without either residing constantly, or going frequently
among

among them, he will never be able to know his people thoroughly. He can never gain a sufficient insight into their peculiar tempers, characters and dispositions, their respective capacities and attainments, and consequently can neither improve their good qualities nor correct their faults so effectually as he ought. By keeping up a strict intercourse with them, he can make a personal application to every one that stands in need of it. He will see what sort of treatment, what kind of instruction each individual requires; will discover their necessities both temporal and spiritual, and will be able to apply the proper remedies to both. His presence will encourage the good, will awe the bad, will enable him to prevent or compose disputes, and to do a number of kind and friendly offices which will give incredible weight to his instructions, and incredible comfort and satisfaction to his people.

Another good effect arising from the residence of the clergy is, that it lays them
almost

almost under a necessity of repairing, preserving, and even improving their parsonage houses and other buildings on their premises, which by those that do not reside, are too often suffered to go to ruin. It must indeed be acknowledged, and I acknowledge it with pleasure, that within these last twenty or thirty years, more has been expended on ecclesiastical houses of every kind than perhaps for a century before. This is a circumstance which reflects much honour upon the clergy. Yet a great deal still remains to be done in this way; and in order to give a greater facility in doing it, the legislature has lately passed an act, to enable those who have not money sufficient of their own for these useful purposes, to raise a part of it at least by a mortgage upon the profits and emoluments of their benefices *. The good

* The Title of the Act is, *An act to promote the residence of the parochial clergy by making provision for the more speedy and effectual building, rebuilding, repairing or purchasing houses, and other necessary buildings and tenements for the use of their benefices.*—It may be had by sending to Mr. Strahan, the King's Printer, in Fleet-street, London, or to Mr. Uriel, Bookseller, in the Inner Temple Lane.

good effects of this useful act will, I hope, soon be visible in every diocese. If any defects should be discovered in it, these may hereafter be supplied. In the meanwhile it becomes us to accept the assistance it offers us with thankfulness, and to meet its kind intentions more than half way.

But neither our exhortations nor our residence will be of any avail, unless we add to them what is of far more consequence than all the rest, a good example. We must instruct our flocks not only with our lips, but with our lives. We must not merely point out the right road to them; but go before and conduct them in it. If our own practice contradicts our doctrines, the consequences both to ourselves and our people must be dreadful. As to ourselves what else can we expect but that terrible, yet just sentence; “ Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant; † ” with respect to our people, the contagion of our vices will infect them like a pestilence.

B

“ A

† Luke xix. 22.

“ A thousand will fall beside us, and ten
 “ thousand at our right hand. §” If they
 see their spiritual guide and director giving
 way to any sinful passions, any unlawful
 and scandalous excesses, they will think
 themselves licensed and authorised to tread
 in his steps. And if they do, with what
 face can we reprove or rebuke them? How
 justly will they retort upon us those bitter
 words of St. Paul, “ Thou that teachest
 “ another, teachest thou not thyself?
 “ Thou that preachest, a man should not
 “ steal, dost thou steal; thou that sayest
 “ a man should not commit adultery, dost
 “ thou commit adultery? Thou that
 “ makest thy boast of the law, through
 “ breaking the law, dishonourest thou
 “ God? †” It is to be hoped indeed
 that few, very few of the clergy are justly
 chargeable with such gross crimes as these.
 Some apostates in so large a number there
 will always be; for there was one traitor
 even among the twelve apostles. But the
 English clergy are, I trust, in general,
 not only irreproachable in their conduct
 but

§ Psalm 91. 7

† Rom. ii. 21, 22, 23.

but exemplary and edifying. Let us however remember that a single bad example will counteract the effect of a thousand good ones ; and that therefore, we ought not to rest till we have entirely taken away all occasion of reproach ; till we have expiated in some measure by the unblemished sanctity of our own lives, those portentous instances of misconduct, which have so recently disgraced our order ; till we have repaired by every exertion in our power, the incredible injury they must have done to religion.

Nor must we content ourselves with abstaining from gross and scandalous crimes. This would be falling far short of our duty indeed. The world expects, and justly expects from us, a higher degree of purity and perfection than from other men. Our constant functions require it, our heavenly Master enjoins it. We must therefore not only keep under and bring into subjection those appetites and propensities which are plainly and palpably criminal, but those also which are in a lower degree blameable and

disreputable; which though they do not render us chargeable with downright vice and immorality, yet lower the dignity of our character, weaken the good influence of our virtues, lessen the weight of our admonitions, and prevent us from doing all that good to mankind, which we have by the most solemn vows and promises engaged ourselves to do. Among these improprieties of conduct may be justly ranked, an immoderate and over anxious solicitude for the emoluments and honours of our profession; a too great fondness for the gaieties, diversions, and amusements of the world; and all unbecoming levities in our conversation, deportment and appearance. Under this last head give me leave more particularly to mention the article of dress; in which I am sorry to observe that some of the younger clergy in several parts of the kingdom (I mean not particularly in this) have been gradually departing from that gravity and sobriety, which the nature of their profession as well as the injunctions of the church require. We are distinguished from all other persons by a
peculiar

peculiar-habit, and instead of being ashamed, we ought rather to be proud of it, as a badge of that high and honourable calling to which we have been admitted. If from a childish passion for shew and finery we endeavour to drop this distinction as much as possible, and to appear as little like clergymen as for shame we can; instead of procuring us admiration and respect, it will only expose us to contempt. After all that the most ingenious contriver can do in this way, he can but be half a beau. He will always carry some unfortunate remnant of his profession about him, that will put the rest of his dress out of countenance, and exhibit such a motley mixture of gaiety and gravity as is truly ridiculous. These observations apply more particularly to that part of the person which is most conspicuous, and where any attempt at fashionable peculiarities is most disgusting. Here, therefore, the younger clergy should be particularly cautious not to depart from that modesty, plainness and simplicity, which ought to regulate every part of their exterior.

But although even the outward appearance is in our case of no small consequence, yet it must be owned and ever remembered, that it is the inward temper and disposition of the soul, which we ought principally to cultivate, and to adorn with all those Christian graces and virtues that our religion enjoins, and our profession peculiarly requires. What these are you cannot be ignorant. They are set forth to you in scripture in the plainest and the strongest terms. Whoever aspires to the lowest office in the church of Christ must be,
 “ blameless, grave, not double-tongued,
 “ not given to much wine, not greedy of
 “ filthy lucre, must flee youthful lusts,
 “ must follow righteousness, faith, charity,
 “ peace. Above all, the servant of the
 “ Lord must not strive, but be gentle un-
 “ to all men, apt to teach, patient, in meek-
 “ ness instructing those that oppose them-
 “ selves.†” This meekness and gentleness of disposition we ought more especially to cherish. It eminently becomes our character; for it was the distinguishing
 feature

† 1. Tim. iii. 8.—2. Tim. ii. 22, 24.

feature in that of our blessed Lord. "Learn of me, says he, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls. §" This will tend above all other things to secure what ought to be the chief object of a clergyman, the esteem and affection of his flock, and "to maintain that quietness, peace, and love," which at his ordination he most solemnly promised to maintain "among all Christian people, especially among those that are committed to his charge." This promise he should have for ever in his thoughts. He should never forget that he is a minister and ambassador of peace; that it is therefore his bounden duty to promote it to the utmost of his power, and to avoid as much as possible engaging either himself or others in any contention or dispute, either private, religious, or political. We are indeed sometimes, unhappily and unavoidably forced by unreasonable and litigious men into contests about our property, which whenever it is unjustly and materially invaded,

B 4

diminished,

diminished, or withheld, it is our duty not to give up without asserting our just rights. But let us have good reason to presume, in the first place, that they *are* our rights. Let us be very clear that we are not ourselves to blame; that we are not ourselves litigious, unreasonable and perverse. Before we seek a remedy in law let us seek it every where else. Let us try every possible means of accommodation; let us make fair and even generous proposals; and rather depart a little from our strict demands than risque the loss of peace and harmony, and consequently of that influence, which we ought always to maintain over the hearts of our people.

In religious controversies, it is but seldom, I hope, that you will have occasion to engage. But whenever you do, you will I am sure see the absolute necessity of the utmost mildness and moderation. Passion and violence will do little service to any cause, to the Christian least of all; and reason, wit, and eloquence will be of no avail, if, while you are contending for
the

the right faith, you lose the right temper of your religion. Much more in political disputes would all excessive vehemence be highly improper and unbecoming in us. There are indeed points of high national importance, where the best and wisest men may sometimes differ in opinion, and it may not be always easy to determine which side is in the right. But we ourselves shall most certainly be in the wrong if we take any other than the mild, the gentle, the conciliating part ; if we do not endeavour to assuage rather than inflame the passions of our countrymen, making use of that most cogent argument of Moses to *his* countrymen on a similar occasion ; “ Sirs, ye are brethren, why “ do ye wrong one to another ? † ” Never indeed was unanimity and concord more necessary than in these times of danger and distress. All ranks and professions of men are now called upon to concur with one heart and one mind in promoting the public welfare and security. And the only way in which *we* can properly

† Acts vii. 26.

perly do this, besides contributing cheerfully our full proportion towards the national expences, is by performing our duty conscientiously and faithfully each in our respective stations ; by exhorting every one else to perform theirs ; by imploring the blessing of Heaven upon our public counsels and undertakings ; by exerting our most strenuous endeavours to stop that deluge of impiety and irreligion, of dissipation and extravagance which has overspread this land ; and which partly by its natural consequences, and still more by provoking the anger of an offended God, has, I am convinced, been the principal, the radical cause of our present misfortunes. This is the conduct *we* ought to observe ; by this we shall not only acquit ourselves properly as ministers of the Gospel, but shall approve ourselves sincere friends to our country, and valuable members of the community. And allow me to add, that nothing less than a general persuasion, that we are useful, and even necessary to the common weal, can give

a permanent security to that generous provision which the laws have made for us. If we consider our preferments merely as estates for life, without any regard to the services and duties with which they are charged, we shall be deemed unworthy of the favour and protection we have hitherto experienced, and shall give an advantage to the enemies of our ecclesiastical constitution, which they will probably be disposed to improve to the utmost, perhaps ultimately to our destruction. But if we apply ourselves heartily and zealously to the discharge of our sacred functions; if we watch with incessant care and tenderness over those whose salvation is in a great measure placed in our hands; if we never cease our most fervent prayers to heaven for the prosperity of the state, and our most earnest endeavours to produce that reformation of manners, which can alone save this country from utter ruin; we shall then undoubtedly secure to ourselves the countenance and support of all ranks of men: we shall repay in the amplest

amplest manner the obligations we owe to the public, and "the labourer" will be universally allowed "to be worthy
" of his hire."

Thus much, my reverend brethren, I had to offer to your consideration at my first entrance on the arduous undertaking now before me. I have not attempted to entertain you with ingenious novelties (for entertainment I apprehend is not our present business), but to remind you only of a few plain truths, which it is of the utmost importance, that both you and I should have deeply impressed both upon our memories and our hearts. In the discharge of this, and every other part of my office, I am very sensible how much I stand in need of all your indulgence towards me, of which, indeed, I have already received very convincing and very encouraging proofs. The only thing I can promise on my part, and that I very safely can, is a good and honest intention; a resolution to decline no labour or trouble that my station requires,

quires, and a constitution not very robust will allow; and a sincere desire to cultivate your friendship and esteem, to live in perfect harmony with you, and to promote in every proper way your ease, comfort, credit, and prosperity. I must entreat you to second, as far as you are able, these good designs; and above all, I must beg you to join your prayers to mine for that assistance from above, without which we shall none of us be able to accomplish our purposes, and perform our respective duties as we ought.

THE END.

[Faint, illegible text]

[Faint, illegible text]



